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ABSTRACT

Interest in the humanities is being revitalized at community and junior colleges through community forums and town meetings. The idea of melding the community forum with the humanities was at the heart of a national humanities demonstration program, in which 11 community colleges participated by developing model community forum programs based upon articles and supplementary materials prepared by distinguished humanists for Courses by Newspaper (CbN). The CbN series of 15 articles serves as a basis for courses at two- and four-year colleges. The community forum demonstration programs added a new dimension to CbN by using lectures, panels, debates, dramatizations, films, or radio broadcasts to provide an informational introduction to open discussion periods. Members of humanities faculties were involved in all aspects of the program, serving on advisory committees and as resource persons, key speakers, panelists, moderators, discussion leaders, and authors. Following the demonstration program, the participating colleges shared their experiences in a series of eight two-day community forum workshops. Many workshop participants are currently preparing a new community forum program entitled "Energy and the Way We Live" for 1980. The energy forum, like many of its predecessors, will be complemented by a variety of media programs and related community events. (AYC)

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COMMUNITY FORUMS: A BOOST FOR THE HUMANITIES

by

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Interest in the humanities is being revitalized at community and junior colleges through community outreach programs with several new twists. The programs that are being offered are community forums and town meetings. Initially, there appears to be nothing new about that. Community colleges have been holding public forums for years. In fact, the recent attention being given community forums at community colleges can be traced to the hundreds of town meetings held by community colleges during the bicentennial as part of the American Issues Forum. As a result of that experience, however, and a series of projects that followed, conducted from 1977 to the present by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, community forum programs at many community colleges have taken on a new look:

- The community forums have become humanities-focused forums.
- The community forums are being linked directly to media programs that are similarly humanities-focused.
- The community forum programs include a host of related humanities-focused events in cooperation with other community groups.

In essence, the humanities are central to this entire community program... the public forums, the newspaper, television and radio components that run concurrently, and the full spectrum of related events that take place at libraries, museums, churches and other community institutions.

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A Humanities-focused Community Forum Demonstration

The notion of melding the community forum and its related events with the humanities through the media was at the heart of a national humanities demonstration program conducted by AACJC with funding from NEH during the fall of 1977 and the spring of 1978. Eleven community colleges participated in the program by developing model community forum programs based upon articles and supplementary materials prepared by distinguished humanists for Courses by Newspaper (CbN), an NEH funded program at University Extension, University of California, San Diego. Courses by Newspaper presents education programs that combine the resources of the nation's newspapers and institutions of higher learning. Each semester, a series of fifteen articles appears in newspapers across the country to serve as the basis for credit and non-credit courses offered at two-year and four-year colleges and universities.

AACJC's community forum demonstration program added a new dimension to Courses by Newspaper. The weekly articles provided program planners with an existing humanities resource that was readily available to forum attendees. The newspaper articles read in advance of each forum stimulated interest and enhanced the participants' understanding of the contemporary issues to be discussed.

In addition to demonstrating an extended and creative area of the media...in this case, newspapers...as enrichment for community discussion, objectives for the participating colleges included:

- to show that community and junior colleges, working with others, could provide through community forums innovative and attractive humanities programs for their communities.
- to demonstrate the relevance and increased understanding that the humanities could bring to today's problems through non-partisan, informed discussion...the kind of discussion that seeks to clarify the value questions that underlie so many of today's perplexing issues.

- to develop replicable humanities-focused community forum models for sharing with community colleges and other institutions.

The participating colleges began planning their programs three months before the first forum was to take place. They worked with specially formed community advisory committees, cosponsoring organizations, humanities faculty and the local media to prepare series of regularly scheduled humanities-focused community forums and related events on the Courses by Newspaper themes and topics.

Each community forum began with an informational presentation such as a lecture, a panel, a debate, a dramatization, a film or a radio or television broadcast. This portion of the forum was followed by a discussion period, a time for expressing and sharing ideas, led by members of the community and the humanities faculty. Forum attendees were advised to read the CbN article in their local newspaper. At some events copies of the relevant articles were distributed for easy reference. The forums were free, open to the public and cosponsored by community service groups, libraries, local media and other interested community organizations and agencies. In addition to the series of public forums, other humanities-focused community events, activities and resources were identified, stimulated and publicized by the community college forum directors; among these were library exhibits, film series, speaker bureaus and festivals, all on the forum issue. These complementary events contributed to the vitality of the program by drawing attention to and reinforcing the themes of the forums. They extended opportunities for citizen participation, thereby enriching the public dialogue.

Sharing the Results at Community Forum Workshops

In the fall of 1978 and the spring of 1979, following the demonstration program, the participating colleges shared their experiences -- what worked,

as well as what did not work -- with community college colleagues at a series of eight two-day regional Community Forum Workshops. The workshops were conducted by AACJC and hosted by the participating colleges, with funds from NEH. Each workshop included an actual community forum. The forum topics and formats differed at each workshop. Among the memorable workshop forums was one conducted by the Tarrant County Junior College District, Fort Worth, Texas entitled "Man's Confrontation with Death." The forum, tied to the Course by Newspaper entitled "Death and Dying," was preceded by a tour of the Pompeii '79 exhibit, a fitting humanities-focused related event. At the outset of the forum, an informational presentation, in two parts, consisted of an abbreviated dramatic presentation of "The Shadow Box," a play by Christopher Isherwood. This was followed by a panel of reactors that included a philosopher, a theologian, a sociologist and a professor of literature. A discussion period, which many attendees felt was too short, concluded the evening event.

Another fine forum model was presented as part of the Community Forum Workshop hosted by Tacoma Community College. Seven cosponsors, including a television station, a newspaper, a library and a university, joined Tacoma Community College to present the forum. Also linked to the Death and Dying course, the forum was entitled "The Moral Dilemmas of Death: Is Life Prolonged Unnecessarily Through Technology?" It was taped for statewide television broadcast in conjunction with statewide forums in local communities sponsored by community colleges. The moderator was a humanist, as was the featured speaker, who had served as national academic coordinator of the Death and Dying course. Panelists included two philosophers, a psychologist and the president of a funeral home. This forum was satisfying in great measure because of the extraordinary skill with which the moderator assured, with appropriate questioning, that each panelist drew for responses upon his humanities background.

Other highlights of the eight Community Forum Workshops were sessions with titles such as "A Humanistic Approach to Community Forum Topics," "Involving Local Media in Community Forums" and "Involving Humanists as Forum Moderators and Presenters." Each workshop also included a session on funding forums that was led by directors of the state humanities councils. Several of the demonstration programs had been co-funded by AACJC and state humanities councils. Programs for the public in which issues are addressed from the humanistic perspective are a primary concern of these councils. Thus, their resources, both financial and programmatic, available to the participating college from the planning period through to the forum, greatly enriched the substantive quality of the entire forum series. It is encouraging to note that one outgrowth of the demonstration program and the follow-up series of workshops has been an increase in working relationships between community colleges and their state humanities councils on community forum programs and other humanities projects.

A Nationwide Humanities-focused Forum on the Energy Issue

The national demonstration program and the workshop series, both having stressed the importance of bringing the humanistic perspective to public discussion of pressing contemporary issues, paved the way for a major community forum program now in the developmental stage. Many of the cadre of five to six hundred community college representatives who either participated in the demonstrations or received training in conducting humanities-focused community forums at the workshops, along with their counterparts at other institutions, are presently gearing up to provide a new community forum program for their communities. AACJC, twelve national participating organizations, ten regional coordinating colleges and hundreds of local participating colleges are conducting a nationwide dialogue entitled "Energy and The Way We Live: A National Issues Forum." The

program, funded by NEH and the U. S. Department of Energy, takes place over a ten-week period during February, March and April, 1980.

The upcoming community forum program is based upon a Calendar of Issues developed by a panel of humanist scholars. The questions raised within the Calendar for nationwide debate are humanistic questions... questions about the ramifications that the energy situation, past and present and future, has for our quality of life...the way we live... questions that can best be addressed by historians, philosophers, professors of literature and other humanists, those who have made the study of human experiences, and in particular the American experience, their lives' work. Through humanities-focused community forums, led in each community by community colleges, the humanities and their practitioners will be brought into the nation's energy debate. The energy forum, complemented by a variety of media programs and related community events, will comprise a comprehensive, cohesive, community outreach program in which the humanities play a central role.

The Humanities Faculty and Community Forums

As part of the national demonstration program and the subsequent forum programs on community college campuses, members of the humanities faculty have been involved in all aspects of the program from the earliest planning stages through to the evaluation processes. They serve as:

- members of specially formed community advisory committees to guide forum programs
- resource persons to identify issues and questions during the forum planning stage
- key speakers during the informational portion of the forum
- panelists and moderators
- speaker bureau members, available to address community groups on forum-related issues

- members of the audience forewarned and prepared with pertinent questions and reactions
- explicators of films and books at forum-related community activities
- round-table discussion leaders
- authors of local newspaper articles on forum topics
- participants in local television or radio forums.

This listing is by no means inclusive; the possibilities, apparently unlimited, seem to be tied to the creativity of the forum planners. At Black Hawk College in Moline, Illinois, responsibility for an entire town meeting series on Crime and Justice in America was assumed by the college's faculty in the humanities with leadership from a full-time project director drawn from the Department of English; each of the town meetings was moderated by a member of the humanities faculty; planning sessions relied heavily upon the experience and advice of faculty humanists; a distinctive series of local newspaper articles accompanying and paralleling the nationally prepared Courses by Newspaper articles was the result of faculty efforts; and members of the humanities faculty participated on local radio and television programs to publicize the forum series. According to the project director, "Our experience with this forum series reaffirmed my strong conviction that a study of the humanities is relevant and that there is a great potential from those trained in the humanities to serve as catalysts for community discussion and change."

Muskegon Community College, for a forum series on Popular Culture: Mirror of American Life, drew forum presenters from the humanities faculty of seven colleges and universities, all members of an existing consortium that shared resources to cosponsor a regional community forum program. With leadership from Muskegon Community College, each member of the consortium hosted one in the series of six forums, drawing upon its own

humanities faculty as well as faculty from the other institutions. The humanists either moderated, made short formal presentations, served on a reaction panel or lead the open discussions that followed. An entire community lecture series, staffed by the humanities faculty, ran concurrently with a series of Crime and Justice forum programs at Coastline Community College. In preparation for the upcoming series of energy forums, a group of visiting writers/humanists with experience in addressing energy issues has been invited to Indian Valley Colleges in Novato, California for two purposes: the group will serve as lecturers for a journalism course and also as presenters at the concurrent community forum program on energy.

Humanities-focused Media Programs as Forum Resources

In addition to linking forums and other community outreach programs to newspaper series, forum planners at community colleges are using humanities-focused television and radio programs as resources for their programs. Forum participants have gathered in community locations to view "Roots," "The Long Search," "The Ascent of Man" or the Shakespeare series and then contributed their views and raised questions during the follow-up discussion session lead by a member of the humanities faculty. In some cases the nationally prepared media programs are viewed either before or after a related community forum as enrichment or reinforcement resources.

Series of radio programs on Courses by Newspaper topics, prepared semi-annually by National Public Radio, have also served as stimulus, background and follow-up for community forums. Usually available on audiotapes, provocative excerpts from these programs have served as the informational portion of a forum when lack of funds or other circumstances have kept a "live" humanist from participating. "Listeners' Guides" complete the package.

This fall, for the first time, forum planners can tie community forums to both Courses by Newspaper and a television series. The BBC series

"Connections," airing over public television and directly related to the Course by Newspaper of the same name, will foster community discussion in hundreds of communities. Some colleges have been experimenting with locally produced television and radio programs that address public issues from the humanistic perspective. They look to local media for forum promotion, as well. By involving the local media from the outset as cosponsors of a forum series they find that good cooperation comes rather automatically.

Local television forums for statewide access over public television has worked well in Washington State, with key speakers such as Governor Dixie Lee Ray and Senator Henry Jackson making actual presentations to which faculty humanists react. At Delgado College, WVUE-TV produced a program to introduce a Crime and Justice forum series that included a segment of person-on-the-street interviews, conversations with several state Supreme Court justices, interviews with the college's forum planners and a call-in component. A nine-hour telethon entitled "Energy Forum Expo" is being produced by WTBS, the Atlanta "superstation," to kickoff AACJC's nationwide humanities-focused energy forum program. A panel of humanists from two and four-year colleges is guiding the program's development.

Community forums, at which pressing issues are addressed from the perspectives of the humanities, and media programs, in which the humanities have been central to their preparation, are natural partners; each reinforces and extends the other's reach. Together they provide the public with a logical and cohesive educational experience.

Other Humanities-focused Related Events

A full-fledged community forum program includes, along with the series of public forums and the direct link to national or local media, a set of related community events, activities and resources, all on the same forum

theme. Each additional activity helps to focus community attention on the topic to be addressed, provides more avenues for participation as well as opportunities to consider aspects of the overall topic not raised at the forum or town meeting. During the community forum demonstration program, the related activities provided a myriad of opportunities for the involvement of faculty humanists. As a part of Keystone Junior College's forum program, humanists led follow-up discussions at local libraries. An all-day Popular Culture Collage Fair at the Fort Worth Museum of Art featured twenty-five presentations by humanists on the effects of popular culture and the media on our lives. The Fair was presented by the Tarrant County Junior College District as a related activity for the Popular Culture forum series. A theatrical presentation of scenes from plays on Crime and Justice themes was offered by a local group of thespians in conjunction with Johnson County Community College's forum series.

Other activities and resources, such as film series, travelling exhibits, videotapes of forum highlights, Spanish translations of the CbN articles, workshops, demonstrations and library displays were initiated by the colleges but implemented by the forums' cosponsoring organizations. Each of these events involved humanists and humanities materials; the colleges, having taken the lead in their communities in developing the forum program, established the humanities focus as a ground rule. This was reinforced by the close link to media programs in the humanities. Similarly, each of the related activities now being planned to complement the energy forums will be a humanities program because it will be directly tied to the Calendar of Issues, a basic humanities document that serves as a common agenda for all participants.

Renewing Interest in the Humanities Through Forums

The colleges that have been providing community forums with a humanities focus are finding an increased awareness in their communities of the special contribution that the humanities offer to citizen understanding of today's problems. Community groups are more frequently looking to the colleges for humanists and other humanities resources for their own public programs. As faculty humanists move out into the community in response to these requests, they become better known and begin to generate students for the courses they offer at the college. Several colleges have offered new humanities courses as the result of community interest engendered by a particular forum topic.

Admittedly, humanities-focused community forums as public service activities, free and open to the public, do not bring in dollars! But the principle of "delayed gratification" operates in that all of the promotion that goes into a community forum program brings the college and its humanities resources to the attention of the community. The forums provide the college unlimited new relationships with cosponsoring organizations, advisory committee members, local media and the general public. The forum program can, in this sense, be perceived as a marketing tool with the benefits reaped in the form of increased enrollments during succeeding semesters. The director of the statewide Tacoma Community College demonstration forum program concluded that "The community forum goals and processes created a breakthrough for Washington's community colleges in their efforts to be a part of the communities they serve. Citizen discussion of vital issues along with the support of newspapers and other media enhance public awareness that the community college can serve them in a new and positive way." James Gollattscheck, president of Valencia Community College, maintains that humanities-focused forums "have proven to be an effective way

getting people in the community involved in a participatory process which shapes the quality of their lives.

By presenting community outreach programs that enable citizens to consider complex contemporary issues informed by the perspectives of the humanities, community colleges are providing a valuable lifelong education experience for their communities. And, at the same time they are giving a boost to the humanities, in general, and specifically to their own humanities departments.

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